

Saxbe Won't Oppose Bill Banning Wiretaps

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Attorney General William B. Saxbe told senators yesterday he could live with a congressional ban on warrantless wiretaps for national security reasons.

The former senator said he wouldn't necessarily recommend taking that step but said it is among three options open to Congress. The others:

- Removing the decision-making process for wiretaps from the Attorney General and placing it in the hands of a board composed of members from all three branches of government.

- Attempting to place such wiretaps under the ordinary legal process of obtaining warrants from the courts.

"Congress could do away with all electronic surveillance," Saxbe told a Senate panel composed of three separate subcommittees.

"That would place us at some disadvantage, but we'd live with it."

"However, I believe that this is a tool that is necessary in this time of terrorism," Saxbe said.

Saxbe asserted that national security wiretaps are now being authorized in strict accordance with a recent Supreme Court decision.

Saxbe and FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley said they knew of no government agency other than the FBI that is now using wiretaps.

Warrantless wiretaps are now authorized only when there is evidence of direct foreign financing, direction and control of espionage or terrorist activities, Saxbe said.

He said there was no such evidence regarding such domestic groups as the Black Panthers and the Symbionese Liberation Army and said no wiretaps had been authorized on these other groups.